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INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 0240  
RUEHUM/AMEMBASSY ULAANBAATAR PRIORITY 0019  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 001114

SIPDIS

NEA/ARP, EAP/K FOR ERICHARDSON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/14/2018  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KTIP](#) [KU](#) [KN](#) [ZO](#)  
SUBJECT: NORTH KOREAN LABORERS VIE FOR EMPLOYMENT  
OPPORTUNITIES IN KUWAIT

Classified By: Political Counselor Pete O'Donohue for reasons 1.4 b and  
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Summary  
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¶1. (C) In response to rumors that North Korean laborers -- a group with a small silhouette on the Kuwaiti landscape -- were particularly vulnerable to human trafficking, Embassy queried local Korean and MFA sources about the status of those workers. The sources claim that the approximately 4000 North Koreans in Kuwait work exclusively in the construction sector and face no exceptional difficulties. They are, however, recruited, vetted, and hired by DPRK-run agencies, an indication that their movement in Kuwait is restricted, as is the case with other expatriate laborers, and that they may not be afforded an opportunity to address grievances. End summary.

DPRK Hand in Recruiting North Korean Laborers for Kuwait  
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¶2. (C) In response to concerns regarding the treatment of North Korean laborers in Kuwait -- a Tier III TIP offender -- Poloff queried Republic of Korea Counselor and Labor Officer Young Il Lee on October 27 about the status of North Korean workers in Kuwait. Lee, who follows North Korean activities closely, told Poloff that the approximately 4000 North Korean laborers in Kuwait are "elite" North Koreans, well-educated and with connections that afford them the opportunity to obtain such "lucrative" positions overseas. Lee added that the chance to obtain a laborer position in Kuwait is sought after by many thousands of DPRK nationals, who vie for only a limited supply of available jobs -- all in the construction sector. According to Lee, requests for employees typically in blocs of 500 are made by the host Kuwaiti construction company to a North Korean subcontractor, which recruits and vets each laborer for the position. The North Korean agents, Lee noted, all belong to DPRK state-run enterprises, affirming the suspicion that the DPRK directly or indirectly controls the movement of expatriate North Korean labor to Kuwait and the terms of employment while in country. With such high competition for jobs, Lee opined that the laborers were charged exorbitant bribes by the DPRK agents, an allegation we have not been able to confirm.

No Complaints from Community  
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¶3. (C) Lee said that local salaries earned by North Korean laborers in Kuwait, approximately USD 300 a month vice the USD 5 monthly wage prevalent in North Korea, enticed North Korean laborers to apply for positions in Kuwait. Lee added that even if "accommodation and company fees" were deducted from salaries -- as he believed they were -- the laborers

still stand to make considerably more in Kuwait than in North Korea. The living conditions of the North Korean laborers in Kuwait are unclear, but Lee presumed that most live in groups of 200-300 men in camps located at 10 or more large construction sites around Kuwait city. The workers are almost exclusively male and appear constrained to leave their families behind in North Korea.

¶4. (C) Attempting to dispel Emboff concerns of trafficking or other human rights violations, Lee emphasized how attractive Kuwait is to the workers; the workers here have free time and "they're not starving." Highlighting a certain level of satisfaction with life here, Lee said the South Korean Embassy recorded only one North Korean defection in Kuwait, and that occurred in 1995. He compared this number to the hundreds of potential defection requests daily awaiting disposition at the South Korean Embassy in Ulan Bataar and other South Korean missions around the world.

¶5. (C) Kuwaiti MFA Asia Desk Officer Rashed Al-Hejiri on November 3 separately affirmed to Poloff Lee's remarks that North Koreans face "no exceptional difficulties" in Kuwait, i.e. none beyond those experienced by other expatriate laborers. Al-Hejiri stressed that Kuwait's open press is now focused on TIP -- largely in response to USG pressure on this issue -- and that hardships suffered by a particular community would be reported. He added that the North Korean Ambassador has never raised any concerns about the treatment of North Korean citizens with the Kuwaiti MFA. Al-Hejiri also squelched rumors we have heard among local diplomats that Kuwait has an interest in establishing regular air service or a diplomatic presence in Pyongyang.

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